

# VIOLENCE AGAINST TEACHERS AT SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA



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GAUTENG**



**SAPA**  
South African Principals' Association  
Affirming School Leaders

# BACKGROUND

- Twenty percent of South Africa's teachers believe that schools are violent places and suspect their students and colleagues are armed.
- This is according to a survey conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council with the Department of Education among more than 20000 teachers at 1380 schools across the country.
- About 17% of teachers reported fights involving weapons at school and almost 13% of teachers believe gangs operate in their school.
- Most reported violence was between pupils or between a pupil and a teacher.

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# UNION VIEWS

- Basil Manuel, the executive director of the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of SA, said that a principal in Lavender Hill in the Western Cape was recently stabbed by a parent who then returned to the school afterwards "to finish him [the principal] off".
- "The principal has left and no one wants to replace him. You must be slightly soft in the head to take the job," he said.
- SA Democratic Teachers' Union spokesman Mugwena Maluleke said: "Teachers feel unsafe in our schools. The young ones in particular - violence is why they resign - not only the low salary."

# DBE VIEW

- Education spokesman Elijah Mhlanga said the department was "extremely concerned" about violence in schools.
- "We are extremely concerned about the violence that takes place in school.
- "It's even more worrying when the violence is against teachers whose job is to impart information to learners.
- "It becomes difficult when they have to teach while thinking about defending themselves. Some of the learners use weapons and as a Department we can't tolerate it," he said.



# INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AT SCHOOLS

- A video showing a pupil throwing what appears to be an exercise book at a teacher in the classroom went viral this week. In the video the teacher walks out of the classroom and appears to make a phone call.
- Some teachers go for counselling after violent incidents but others “don’t want to be recognised as having been manhandled or defeated [by pupils]. Even the process of counselling they see as an embarrassment
- In the Sedibeng school video the other pupils are laughing as they watch the teacher being hit and walking out of the classroom.
- “... they are laughing because they expected the teacher to react because society says you must fight back. The teacher did the right thing by not fighting back but walking out.



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# WHAT IS THE DBE's SOLUTION

- Department of Basic Education says it has measures in place to ensure pupils are held accountable for their actions.
- The step-by-step process to be followed by the department in disciplining pupils who attack teachers at schools is:
  - The pupil is suspended from school for five days.
  - After five days of suspension, a disciplinary hearing is held.
  - When the hearing is concluded, the pupil is sanctioned.



# INCIDENTS IN PROVINCES

- In April, the Sunday Times reported that hundreds of pupils have faced disciplinary action in the past year for offences ranging from assault, intimidation, drug dealing and sexual violence. According to the report, Limpopo education officials alone have handled 942 cases of serious pupil misconduct in the past 12 months.
- The province's statistics revealed 358 pupils were involved in physical abuse, including assaulting other pupils.
- Since January last year, Gauteng schools have expelled 151 children, 31 of them for assaulting teachers and other school staff.

- The Free State Department of Education says it is concerned by the assault on teachers by learners in the province's schools. Three teachers were assaulted by learners at two schools in Botshabelo and in Bloemfontein.
- One of them a female teacher had her clothes torn by a group of learners during the assault.
- Provincial Education Department Deputy Director General, Motseki Monnane says statistics show that on average, a school finds dangerous weapons three times a year.
- “ The use of dangerous weapons like testimony related by one of our teachers from Leratong Secondary School in Botshabelo where a learner shot another in a school yard in Qwa Qwa, so it is very clear that the use of dangerous weapons in our schools is now becoming a serious issue.”



# WHAT ARE TEACHERS SAYING

They don't want to be known as the person who was unable to discipline a child...so many are quiet about it

But for most teachers, they feel that even when the methods are applied, it is the consequences that are not adequate and very often teachers complain about the children who have been found guilty of all sorts of mayhem are then placed back into the same class with the very same teachers that they may have assaulted.

These pupils come back as heroes and it just further breaks down the entire system of discipline.

# EXAMPLES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST TEACHERS

- Pupils slap, stab, threaten and throw chairs at teachers.
- Teachers fight schoolboys over schoolgirls, while female teachers are sexually harassed by boys they teach, the same boys who have had sex with other women teachers.
- These were some of the tales of violence in schools teachers told City Press this week.
- “These boys sometimes don’t understand why a female teacher refuses when approached. Teachers resist and fight back. Things are getting out of hand. It’s the survival of the fittest. It’s the law of the jungle out here,” said one.

# COMMENTS FROM NGO's and OTHER AGENCIES – STORIES OF VIOLENCE

- Manene Tabane, Gauteng chairperson for the Congress of Traditional Leaders of SA, said he had heard horrifying stories from teachers in Gauteng schools.
- “Teachers feel like they are just cheque collectors. Their morale is low. They can no longer discipline pupils. They feel they are not protected. Boys are proposing to their female teachers because there are no serious repercussions for their actions,” he said.
- One teacher said detentions and suspensions have proved ineffective in some schools, as parents either protest or pupils simply repeat offences, leaving teachers feeling powerless.
- Nosisa Thinta\*, a head of department at a school in Tembisa, found herself on the receiving end of the violence two years ago, when a Grade 11 pupil slapped her when she asked him why he was not in class.



# COMMENTS FROM NGO's and OTHER AGENCIES – STORIES OF VIOLENCE

- “He was hanging out on the balcony and I asked him why he was not in class. He turned, without saying a word, and slapped me. He slapped me so hard I lost my balance,” she said. The boy ran away. He was expelled following a disciplinary hearing.
- Thinta still lives with the effects of that slap. She can now only partially see with her left eye.
- “I don’t know who to sue: the child, his parents or the department,” she said.
- She laid assault charges against the boy, but withdrew them because she didn’t want him to have a criminal record that could affect him for the rest of his life.



- Shortly after her assault, another schoolboy threw a chair at her colleague while walking down the school stairs, after the teacher reprimanded him for not doing his homework. Even talking to pupils and punishing them by making them clean toilets and classrooms was not longer working, Thinta said

# City Press reports

- From Eastern Cape teachers of women staff being beaten for rejecting schoolboys' sexual advances. Meanwhile, boys have stabbed or used guns to threaten male teachers who propositioned their girlfriends at school.
- In Limpopo, City Press was told of male teachers being sexually harassed by schoolgirls.
- Chris Mdingi, Eastern Cape secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (Sadtu), said detaining and suspending these children sometimes did not work.
- "I don't know if it's the pigment of our skins. Parents in our schools sometimes get arrogant when teachers write to them informing them about their behaviour or about their not submitting tasks. That is not happening at former model C schools," he said.



# PRESS INFORMATION

- Sadtu general secretary Mugwena Maluleke said the situation at schools around the country was bad.
- “Pupils violate the rights of other pupils and teachers, and teachers violate the rights of pupils and of other teachers.”
- Maluleke said social ills and violent service-delivery protests had compounded the problem. The only solution was for parents to discipline their children and teach them the value of education.

# WHAT THE PRESS SAYS

- Tough school leadership was required and teachers needed to set an example by behaving professionally, being punctual, arriving to lessons prepared and for government to provide support.
- “Schools should not be boring places. There must be recreational facilities, so children can enjoy being at school. These children have their own culture and they know their rights,” Maluleke said.

# WHAT IS SACE SAYING?

- Themba Ndhlovu, spokesperson of teachers' regulatory body, the South African Council for Educators, said they had no figures of how many teachers had been assaulted by pupils.
- “However, we hear about this through the grapevine. We’ve been saying to teachers that they must report these incidents, even though we do not have jurisdiction over pupils.”

# WHAT SACE SAYS?

- Ndhlovu said detentions and suspensions worked in some schools, but that others had reverted to illegally meeting out corporal punishment since April. A total of 141 complaints regarding the latter had been lodged.
- “All these are under investigation, with some already at the disciplinary hearing stage,

# Examples: Violence and abuse against teachers



# Video of learner attacking the teacher



# SASOLBURG PUPIL SHOOTS TEACHER



# CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

- SAPA presented this paper to the DBE and this prompted the Minister to convene an urgent leadership summit with all relevant stakeholders regarding this matter of teacher violence. A task team was selected SAPA has now been included.
- Principals and teachers need to be given an assurance of protection against physical harm from learners and parents.
- All schools should have security guards as mandatory in their post establishment and the norms and standards amended accordingly.

# THE WAY FORWARD

- Parents need to be held accountable for their children's actions.
- More severe punishment should be in place for perpetrators of violence against teachers.
- The 2015/2018 Summit outcomes and decisions have not been actioned and there is still many issues still pending and challenges not resolved.
- A steering committee has now been mandated by the Minister to research and develop clear strategies to deal with this surge in school violence.

# World views on school violence

